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# Retelling the city

## Competing spaces of social engagement in Cape Town

*Stefanie Kappler*

Cape Town is known around the world for its beauty, the view of Table Mountain, and perhaps also for its proximity to Robben Island, which has become a major tourist destination. At the same time, it has become South Africa's most segregated city since 1985, when 150,000 people were forced to leave their homes and to relocate outside the city centre. In fact, it is impossible to read and understand Cape Town outside the context of apartheid and its associated attempt to segregate cities along racial lines (Cook, 1991). The legacy of apartheid and its policies of racial segregation is nowhere more visible than in Cape Town, which is the most internally diverse city of South Africa, but, as a result, also the one where efforts to racially segregate the cityscape were most intense during apartheid. And although the latter formally ended in 1994, its legacy on the urban landscape is still clearly visible (cf. Turok, 2001). At the same time, South African cities have also been said to be centres of resistance against apartheid as a result of a variety of transformative practices emerging from cities (Robinson, 2004: 161).

What this chapter aims to do is, rather than investigating the processes of segregation and transformation of the city as a whole, to focus on what is going on *underneath* the surface of the city as a whole, and to look at movements and processes within the cityscape. Ironically, the very transformative activities we can find in the contemporary era seem to be taking place in the very segregated areas that were created under apartheid. Resistance is taking place

in the townships created by apartheid politicians to undermine it, and activities are happening where they were supposed to be suppressed. Hence, the deliberate attempt to distance black and coloured people from the centre of gravity of the city (that would be the city centre) by relocating them to the political peripheries of the city, has led to the emergence of multiple, alternative centres of agency and transformation. Townships, for instance, have developed their own, often informal, mechanisms to cope with their marginalisation from the political centre. This chapter therefore takes account of the resilience of communities under pressure in the cities, to shed light on their abilities to reconstruct semi-formal political structures where they feel excluded from formal structures, spatially, politically and economically. I argue that peripheries are never only marginal, but have the ability to turn into cores or centres themselves. The question as to whether a locale (a township or district) is at the core or on the periphery of a city is therefore a matter of perspective.

Against this background, this chapter highlights the spatial policies of segregation and relocation as highly contested issues of the post-apartheid city of Cape Town. In fact, the contestation over the ways in which cities should be inhabited, governed, and structured have not waned after South Africa's democratic transition since 1994, but have instead taken on a modified form, with segregation still remaining one of the core challenges of the city. At the same time, segregation and relocation are not exclusively a matter of race any more – although the racial dimension must not be neglected – but instead they represent the complex interplay between identity categories, including race, gender, and class. The associated forms of segregation continuing to exist based on such categories and the restrictions in cross-category mobility (spatially, ethnically, economically, and politically) act as sources of frustration among those disadvantaged, and as targets of resistance at the same time.

Through its focus on the subjective cores and peripheries that emerge in this complex spatio-political landscape of Cape Town, this chapter aims to contribute to the literature of peace and conflict studies. It brings a spatial perspective to the ways in which conflict is rendered visible, highlighting the centrality of space in the ways

in which people experience conflict. In that respect, spatial organisation – that is, where one lives, where one moves, and which places are denied – represent important everyday-life experiences of conflict and help us understand not only municipal bureaucracy, but also the underlying political economies of segregation and relocation.

This chapter is informed by two longer trips to Cape Town, during the course of which I had the privilege of being able to move around from very well-to-do parts of the city to poorer townships. Not only the ability to move around the different areas of Cape Town, but also interviews and conversations with a variety of community activists, peace workers, and academic institutions helped my understanding of the complex challenges that the inhabitants of the Greater Cape Town area face, as well as the central significance of space and location in the politicisation of communities. In spending time with residents of different parts of Cape Town, I was amazed by the ability of people not only to cope with the constraints imposed upon them by geopolitics on a small scale, but also by their creative abilities to transcend those constraints in order to make their voices heard. At the same time, while moving around in the different parts of the city, it became obvious that the location of a ‘core’ or centre of activity, as opposed to a periphery or marginalised area, is largely a matter of perspective. For instance, quite a few people in the city centre would point out to me that the townships outside the city centre were far away from political activities. Yet speaking to people in those townships did not suggest an apolitical or even apathetic stance at all. And, of course, it must not be neglected that my own position as an ‘outsider’ played into the ways in which spatiality was presented to me in conversations (cf. Kappler, 2013). In that sense, a reflexive approach to ‘field’ research was necessary, acknowledging the researcher’s own positionality in the research jigsaw, and even the fact that the researchers themselves can be a site of investigation (Robertson, 2002: 786–7). However, even a reflexive approach comes with the danger of essentialising or ‘othering’ a particular place as different from one’s own (Robertson, 2002: 789). In that respect, rather than claiming that such processes as I will outline below are unique to Cape Town, I would suggest that similar mechanisms are at play in different locales. Yet it is the

context of apartheid which makes issues of racial segregation and relocation so notable in South African cities, so Cape Town represents a powerful example of how spatial politics serves as a tool of repression and liberation alike.

### From cores to peripheries

Following Lefebvre (1979: 290), in the context of globalisation and redifferentiation, we can see an ‘explosion of spaces’, that is, the formation of a number of spaces developing in the context of the capitalist division of labour. Similarly, Soja (1996) has emphasised the networked nature of space, connected between cores and peripheries. Based on this, Soja (2009: 3) highlights the political nature of spatial control in its attempt to control, privilege, and create hierarchies between different spatial units:

The political organization of space is a particularly powerful source of spatial injustice, with examples ranging from the gerrymandering of electoral districts, the redlining of urban investments, and the effects of exclusionary zoning to territorial apartheid, institutionalized residential segregation, the imprint of colonial and/or military geographies of social control, and the creation of other core–periphery spatial structures of privilege from the local to the global scales.

In the context of this chapter, it therefore suggests itself to briefly investigate the notion of *core* (or centre) and *periphery* as ways of structuring the city, both academically and politically. This debate reflects an underlying paradigmatic reasoning to conceptualise power asymmetries (Vanolo, 2009: 28, 30), while a clear-cut binary representation of the city can at the same time be criticised. Indeed, the question which arises at this stage is whether we can define in an analytically clear-cut way which urban spaces are more central, or, alternatively, more marginal? The chapter will claim that the distinction between cores and peripheries is not neat, but subjective and flexible in nature. Therefore, the inherent multiplicity of space (Massey, 2001: 259) would suggest that it is not sufficient to investigate what is formally considered a core, or a periphery, but instead

to look at the multiple readings and interpretations of space. How is it used, interpreted, and understood from various perspectives? What are the mechanisms of control and resistance inscribed into spaces and spatial divisions?

In the field of urban studies, the multiplicity of space has not always been clearly investigated. Instead, there has been a tendency to read the city as an emancipatory space, particularly in the West (Lees, 2004: 5). As Lees (2004: 9) has suggested, we tend to work with a flawed Anglo-American notion of the emancipatory city, confronted with oppressive suburbs. However, this notion seems to neglect the complex life which we can observe in suburbs, as well as the reconstruction of political life outside the administrative centre of the city as a whole. In this context, Back and Keith (2004: 62) have emphasised the need to look at micro-levels of analysis (such as suburbs) 'as nuclei around which official cartographies of much wider areas coalesce' and how they shape policy actions. Back and Keith (2004: 58) add that 'it is helpful to think about the landscapes of the city in terms of the *micro-public spheres* of specific buildings, sites, and places associated with routinized forms of behaviour structuring the temporality of social processes'.

In that sense, a focus not merely on smaller entities, such as buildings, but also on smaller communities within cities as we find them in neighbourhoods or townships, can help us understand the formation of new socio-political centres as they emerge in communities. In South Africa, this can be seen as an outcome of apartheid policy the 'self-sustaining geography' of which has made 'residential segregation ... natural and normal' (Besteman, 2008: 50). However, this is not to say that these artificially created 'containers' of segregation are stable or static. Instead, as much as they restrict movement, they open possibilities of transgression and movement (cf. Robinson, 1998). This is not only in resistance to policies of the centre, but also as stand-alone strategies in their own right, often to satisfy needs of the respective local communities.

Such reversals of meaning – that is, the policies that turn a periphery into a core – are not least a result of the power and agency of those operating within what can be considered a restricted or marginalised space. In that vein, Robinson (2000: 286) suggests

that 'the imaginative spatialities with which we describe processes of transformation shape our sense of political possibilities and hence our political choices'. Cresswell (1996: 163) suggests that 'The unintended consequence of making space a means of control is to simultaneously make it a site of meaningful resistance.' This points to the ability of actors to create structures, such as contexts and boundaries of a neighbourhood, by engaging 'in the social activities of production, representation, and reproduction' (Appadurai, 1996: 185). Agency can therefore be read as a spatial practice, not only complicit in the creation of control structures, but also in the ability to challenge and overcome them in various ways. Agency can thus turn a core into a periphery, or vice versa.

The ambivalence of residential segregation policies is therefore, as I argue, that whilst they aim to restrict agency and try to prevent resistance against deeply embedded power imbalances, they often result in the transformation of power relations and trigger new configurations, both within the structures created and across them. New networks emerge based on oppressive politics, not only to comply with them, but also to challenge them on their own terms. The new infrastructures built within the engineered microscapes of cities therefore reflect attempts of communities to cope with formal politics, and to replace them with alternatives in their local context. The use of these spaces of oppression and transformation is reflected in their infrastructures, their users, their practices and symbolisms. This speaks to Lefebvre's notion of 'representational spaces' or *espace vécu* lived space (Lefebvre, 1991). Representational spaces represent complex symbolisms and link to the underground side of social life (Lefebvre, 1991). They constitute a 'space as directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of "inhabitants" and "users" as well as a "space" which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate' (Lefebvre, 1991: 39). In that sense, lived space denotes the fact that spaces are always filled with a life of their own, with symbolisms and meanings developed by the very users of that space.

Against this background, microspheres within urban spaces (whether they be cores or peripheries) can be considered lived sub-spaces of the urban, yet developing their very own dynamics

and infrastructures which do not necessarily parallel the infrastructures of the wider city. While they may replicate power structures as present in the formal realm of urban administration, they may also counter and challenge them, overtly and/or subtly. In that respect, James Scott's notion of peasant resistance (Scott, 1990) is not limited to rural areas, but we can also observe 'hidden transcripts' and the subversion of oppressive structures in the political, economic, or social peripheries of cities. This also means that, through subversive practices, cores can be turned into peripheries, and vice versa.

### South Africa, Cape Town, and spatial divisions

South Africa has had to grapple with a difficult history of war, conflict, violence, and racial segregation. The twentieth century was largely shaped by the power politics of a white minority over a black majority, and black/coloured resistance against the politics of oppression and segregation. Black people were worst off in terms of being denied all access to whites-only facilities and being denied political rights, while policies towards coloured people were less predictable in that some were interpreted as more white or more black (Besteman, 2008: 171 ff.). It was only in 1994 that the African National Congress (ANC), under the leadership of Nelson Mandela, won democratic elections and launched a transition away from the politics of apartheid to democracy.

At the same time, this process of transition was accompanied by rapid privatisation and the country's transformation into a market economy through the privatisation and neoliberalisation of the economy, as a result of both internal and external debates between the leading political parties, international organisations, such as the International Monetary Fund, and foreign investors (Habib and Padayachee, 2000). Such policies brought their own problems, including unemployment, cuts in public services, social exclusion, and 'racial capitalism' (Beall, 2002: 47–50). In 2012, the World Bank produced a critical report, outlining 'inequality of opportunity' as one of the key challenges that South Africa faces, while pointing to the fact that economic growth has not benefitted all sectors of society equally (World Bank, 2012).



Hence, while hopes for the transformation of society, linked to the political and economic empowerment particularly of black and coloured people, were high, such hopes were increasingly disappointed as practices of exclusion persisted. Large numbers of the poor live in townships, excluded from access to the job market or the market economy more generally. At the same time, the government struggles to overcome the physical racial divisions still visible in the cities as a legacy of the apartheid system. Indeed, despite the city government's move to rename streets after opponents of apartheid – most notably Nelson Mandela and Helen Suzman – one cannot overlook the physical racial divisions in the city's infrastructures, by which some areas appear white-only, while others are black-only or coloured-only (cf. Polgreen, 2012).

Cape Town has been affected massively by policies of racial segregation and at the same time is home to a large number of coloured people who have long found themselves in between white and black identity, socially, culturally, and even linguistically (cf. Kamwangamalu, 2004). In terms of segregation, we find that the black communities, and the coloured communities to a slightly lower extent, have been affected most strongly by policies of segregation and spatial control. Most notably, the Group Areas Act, passed in 1950, envisaged the relocation of non-whites to townships, away from the city centres, and resulted in massive relocation campaigns. The end goal was to remove blacks from the city centres, to further divide society along racial lines, and to engrain white supremacy in the spatial outlook of the city. These divisions are still clearly visible, for instance in townships such as Khayelitsha (an estimated populace of more than 1 million people) or the smaller suburb of Langa, having become almost towns of their own, to name but two. The history of Langa even dates back to a pre-apartheid law, the so-called Natives (Urban Areas) Act No 21 of 1923, which restricted the movement of blacks between rural and urban areas, and which led to the creation of Langa in 1927. Other areas designed to house black and coloured people who were forced out of the city included Gugulethu, Nyanga, Mitchell's Plain, Delft, and Blue Downs, all lacking public facilities and services (Turok, 2001: 2351). According to Wilkinson (2000: 197):

By 1980, Greater Cape Town's population had increased to almost 1.9 million people, of whom 573,000 were White, 995,600 were Coloured and African households were again living in informal settlements or under intolerably overcrowded conditions in the townships.

These racial divisions are still persistent in the urban geography of Cape Town, as Besteman (2008) highlights. At the same time, these divisions have increasingly changed into economic cleavages, with growing class divisions in the urban landscape (Besteman, 2008: 50). Indeed, the negative effects of neoliberalisation, coupled with the transitional period after the end of apartheid in 1994, have exacerbated economic fault lines in society. While it can now be said that the upper class is racially mixed, poverty still seems to be affecting the black and coloured communities most. These divisions are reflected in the urban landscape of Cape Town (and other South African cities). It becomes particularly evident through the deliberate isolation of the so-called 'gated communities' from their neighbourhoods (Lemanski, 2006), with walls around the wealthier enclaves cementing the gulf between the rich and the poor. Communities are therefore increasingly based on a rigid separation between the rich and the poor, and communication between them is difficult, not least through the physical obstacles preventing dialogue and meeting on an everyday basis. However, divisions can be observed directly, marked not merely by walls but also by the geographical distance of the townships from the city centre. The lack of a comprehensive public transport network to connect the different parts of the city is indicative of the administrative centre's low concern with the mobilisation of larger parts of the population, let alone efforts to bring together the city's inhabitants. Despite increasing subsidies, Turok (2001: 2352) observed that the poor still spend at least 10 per cent of their income on public transport. There is still a pressing need for a coordinated, convenient, and affordable public transport system for the city as a whole in order to ensure genuine mobility between communities (Wilkinson, 2000: 203).

In this context, it has also been argued that not only are the town-

ships disconnected from the centre due to the costs associated with public transport, but that this is a deliberate decision (Robinson, 2004: 167). At the same time, the divisions are permeable, and, to a certain extent, people do move across the city and transcend those divisions (Robinson, 2004: 167). Due to the lack of adequate public transport, a lot of the poorer population use the minibus system to move outside their neighbourhoods. At the same time, Besteman (2008: 82) suggests that divisions are more than merely logistical, pointing to people's fear of crossing into an area they are not familiar with. Such fears are not least linked to the country's high levels of criminality, but also to psychological barriers and feelings of not being welcome in particular areas. Markers of exclusion continue to be race, but also one's economic situation, the lack of employment outside one's community, and so forth. The attachment to the political centre thus remains weak, with networks being formed mainly within communities rather than outside or across them.

Against this background, the following section will investigate in more detail the ways in which communities have reconstructed their own 'cores' in the light of growing disappointment with the city administration and the state as a whole. I will highlight a few examples which reflect the extent to which communities have demonstrated their resilience and ability to compensate for the lack of central services, and how new centres of social and political gravity have been able to emerge from this lack. For this purpose, I will first look at two initiatives in the township Khayelitsha, before attempting a closer reading of District Six. These examples will shed light on the extent to which different sets of agents (community actors, social movements, and museums) have developed the capability of transforming seemingly marginalised peripheries of the city into core areas in their own right, and to rebrand the perception of those marginalised spaces as key spaces of political agency.

## Community divisions and the formation of new cores

### *Khayelitsha*

I would first like to look at Khayelitsha, the largest township outside Cape Town. As outlined above, Khayelitsha is a product of apartheid policies intended to push black and coloured people out of the city centres. It is perhaps slightly more privileged than some other townships (such as Malawi Town) in that it meanwhile has electricity. Poverty levels, however, are still deeply worrying, sanitation and the provision of basic services are more than limited and crime rates have contributed to the overall feeling of insecurity, particularly for women in the township (cf. Nleya and Thompson, 2009). Interestingly, a large body of literature on Khayelitsha focuses, justifiably, on the role of HIV/AIDS as well as the associated problems. At the same time, the resilience of the community in dealing with this has only marginally been a subject of research (cf. Chandler, 2012). In this context, Tshehla (2002) has highlighted non-state and informal actors that have emerged in Khayelitsha, such as street communities and private security agents. Although these arrangements are a response to the lack of central provision of such services, they do not extend to the whole community, which is rather large in Khayelitsha (Tshehla, 2002). This reflects the extent to which the township is heterogeneous, shaped by a diversity of formal and informal actors, and is not just one coherent unit. At the same time, the township is often referred to in relative terms, that is, in relation to the city of Cape Town. In that vein, Khayelitsha is seen as being a township on the 'outskirts' of Cape Town, although it could also be considered a city in its own right. Against this background, a number of initiatives have emerged in the township aiming to cater for and include people marginalised from formal politics, and partly even from informal political mechanisms. Such initiatives have claimed back the agency that spatial segregation has tried to deny them. They have been able to redefine their position in relation to the social and political centre of Cape Town, and to demonstrate the political power of those areas which have suffered most from divisive politics.

One of those initiatives is Abigail's Women's Movement (AWM),<sup>1</sup> a movement which started in 1999 from a prayer group. The group started working with seniors as, according to a door-to-door survey by the movement, they were in most need of community support due to a lack of public services from the municipality or the state. AWM kept expanding its services to various members of the community. They include elderly people, children, stroke patients, and blind people, that is, people who need additional community support. AWM's approach is clearly needs-based in that they respond to the deficiencies in Khayelitsha, including transport, food, and health care. They pick people up and take them to the community centre; they provide food, medicine, physiotherapy, entertainment, and opportunities for people to socialise. People using their services are numerous, and according to the organiser, the group has a 'hectic programme'. A lot of the work is done by volunteers, including people working in the soup kitchen or a retired teacher helping children with their schoolwork. Volunteers also go to people's houses when they are unable to come to the group centre, and there is counselling support for orphans through a bereavement support group. It is interesting to see that AWM grew from a very small faith-based initiative into a larger community support network to which people from the whole of Khayelitsha are invited to come. This is also reflected in the movement's funding situation, with no funding being allocated when they first started their activities. Now, door-to-door campaigning to raise money has evolved into a government-funded initiative as AWM receives the premises and water use for free. Hence, although the support from the government is not excessive, it helps AWM to go about its daily work, which has become so popular that it had to start turning people down.

The people using the services of AWM receive their services on the spot, just like a number of other similar groups located in Khayelitsha. For many of them, such community centres have become the core of their social activities, reducing their focus and dependency on the city of Cape Town, from where they are physically and often also ideationally distant. Such community centres thus become new cores of a community around which they centre their social life. One

could argue that the resilience that such communities demonstrate reinforces existing divisions, while, on the other hand, it contributes to a stronger feeling of integration in the local community. The ambition to distance oneself from the supposed core of the city thus adds gravity to the cohesion of the periphery. It is interesting to note that the government is acknowledging AWM's achievements, the reasons for which may be subject to debate, but are certainly connected to the effort of outsourcing public services to 'subcontractors' in a market environment (cf. Bezuidenhout and Fakier, 2006). This is coupled with an increasing 'socio-spatial fragmentation' of the urban landscape as a result of the inequalities brought through neoliberal policies (Roshan Samara, 2010: 640). At the same time, this fragmentation and growing distance between the city centre, or even the state, and the 'peripheries' has not resulted in a lack of organisation, but has instead provided the ground for a new decentralised order, during the course of which community actors have taken on the burden of basic service provision. Yet such activities are not restricted to social care, but have also taken on a political character, so political mobilisation seems to happen in communities rather than on a city-scale. Political agency as such is perhaps not what one would expect of such community groups, but one cannot overlook the extent to which such groups have helped empower the most marginalised groups in townships in terms of giving them a voice as well as translating local needs into political action. This becomes spatially relevant in that actors such as AWM are responding to the marginalisation of Khayelitsha in city politics, and instead empower the local neighbourhood by responding to their needs and voicing those needs to potential funders, which are most likely placed at the municipal or national level. AWM are not putting up with being located at the periphery, but create their own cohesion mechanisms to make their centre a relevant core for the local community.

In that sense, political mobilisation has been strong in Cape Town's peripheries, which the example of Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM) aptly illustrates.<sup>2</sup>

The shackdwellers' movement Abahlali baseMjondolo started in the city of Durban in 2005 during a road blockade of around 20,000 people. From the very beginning, the movement demonstrated its

disappointment with the government which they had long supported, but which, as the shackdwellers felt, was not interested in their everyday challenges (cf. Gibson, 2008: 7ff). The movement particularly took issue with the government-directed relocations, which made them feel almost as they had during the relocation policies during apartheid (Gibson, 2008: 7). The campaign spread from Durban to other cities, such as Cape Town, and created an alliance with the Landless People's Movement in Johannesburg. It was in 2008 that AbM was launched in the Western Cape, increasingly building an agenda different to the one in Durban.

It can be argued that the needs of the communities in Cape Town and Durban are similar in that they are related to poor people's marginalisation from the city centres and the repeated relocation orders. However, tensions between the work in Durban and the Western Cape (primarily about the degree to which the movement should be structured, but also about the fact that AbM in Durban often served as a resource for white academics, meant that AbM Western Cape increasingly focused its own work on the challenges they faced in, specifically, Cape Town. In Khayelitsha, the movement concentrated on the provision of electricity, which the township was only given in 2012, the lack of which undermined people's possibilities of disseminating information as widely and globally as possible whether as a website or in township journalism.

AbM in Cape Town also successfully fought against the mass evictions of around 4,000 people ordered by the Ministry of Housing in 2005. AbM particularly highlighted the lack of security and public transport and the health implications linked to the forced relocations and evictions of the shackdwellers. In highlighting to the government that evictions would be more expensive than building facilities, they managed to stop the eviction campaign. 2010 was a particularly important year for AbM as a result of the Football World Cup, as the construction of new stadia meant the forced removal of a large number of residents in those areas. AbM highlighted the fact that due to those evictions, established informal social networks, as they arise in townships, are usually broken, which meant the breakdown of the social fabric of informally organised neighbourhoods. Their 'Right to the City Campaign' also pointed to the lack of consultation

with community members during the course of these relocalisations, so demonstrations in town followed. All these efforts, according to the coordinator, were attempts to 'challenge the ANC from the inside', while suffering from the perception that politicians are not willing to listen to the grievances of the shackdwellers. However, when journalists became more involved in reporting on such grievances due to mass protests and the work of AbM, the organisation saw some improvement in terms of how they were being heard in government. The creation of their own website (<http://abahlali.org/>) as well as some donations from the South Africa Development Fund are indicative of this gradual success.

What this example reflects is the extent to which the peripheries of the city become the centre of political mobilisation. This may not be surprising, given that political mobilisation often arises from a perspective of exclusion, but it is arguably not in line with the city administration's envisaged relocation plans. I would instead argue that the destruction of the social fabric linked to the eviction campaigns is meant to undermine resistance, as it not only pushes people away from the geographical centres of policy-making, but also undermines the opportunities to mobilise through long-term contact and interaction within the communities. Yet, these measures do not seem to have eliminated the possibilities of collective protest, while they have perhaps changed the conditions under which protest happens. The government may not have expected nor supported the shackdwellers to be agents of change, but the latter did manage to politicise the forced relocations and thus exert political pressure, which did not go unnoticed.

### *District Six*

Let us now turn our attention to District Six, a residential area in the inner city of Cape Town. District Six has long had a reputation of being multicultural, cosmopolitan, and colourful, hosting a mix of different ethnic groups. However in the late 1960s, the area was declared 'whites only' and all coloured and black people were forcibly evicted (Geschier, 2007: 38). At the same time, this notion of a cosmopolitan area is still contested today, as Geschier (2007: 40) suggests that



District Six only came to be an important signifier of multicultural life due to its destruction. In that sense, the place can be said to have come into existence because of its loss, a narrative which currently strengthens the community of returnees to the district.

This is also the capital on which the District Six Museum, launched in 1994, builds its narrative.<sup>3</sup> The museum is not only an exhibition space symbolising the district as an area, but is also involved in supporting people returning to District Six. It is in this frame that the museum has evolved from a history of activism, not least through a 'Hands off District 6' campaign. This campaign was launched in 1989 to stop multinational corporations from occupying the district, and at the same time paved the way for the restitution of land to those formerly expelled.

One of the aims is to reconnect different generations in order to establish a memory in dialogue between older generations (who remember pre-eviction life in the area) and children who often lack the spatial memory and imagination of District Six. This is particularly crucial in a context in which young people tend to grow up with seemingly natural divisions, and have not experienced the feeling of being part of a racially diverse community. The museum sheds light on the possibility of living in a community independent of one's ethnic or racial identity, and thus relies on an intergenerational memory narrative where the past can serve as an inspiration for the present. Such an approach is clearly transformative in nature in that it encourages people to see beyond the divisions and challenges the impression that these are irreversible and set in stone.

Geschier (2007: 39) outlines how the museum is based on a participatory approach in that it is based on contributions by former residents and returnees. In that sense, the museum claims to be more than a 'normal' museum through its appeal to social consciousness and allowing people from within the community to throw out ideas into the space. Participants have included musicians, writers, artists, community, politicians, and academics, and claims to have its voice present in bigger community discourses. The latter include the media, schools, and everyday life discourses.

The idea of becoming a community space is further reinforced by the Homecoming Centre, located next to the Museum and

affiliated with it. The centre serves as a venue for different kinds of events such as book launches, usually with a socially engaged character to them. It is also a venue where the museum staff organise soup kitchens and high tea for elderly people, all of which are rather popular in the community and are well attended. In that sense, the Homecoming Centre can be considered an arena for meetings and a platform on which people can exchange their stories of relocation as well as their potential opportunities to return to District Six. The strong nostalgia that relocated people and returnees seem to have for the district makes the Homecoming Centre a popular location. The centre indeed hosts a regular series of events, often funded with sporadic international donations and grants, and has turned into a place where people from different racial and economic backgrounds can meet, all in the spirit of how District Six is remembered.

The aims of the museum are not only social, but also political in nature, in that it deals with contested issues such as land restitution policy since 1994 and the different modes of restitution. The museum's 'Hands on District Six' campaign similarly picks up the contested issues of memory, and follows up on the 'Hands off District 6' campaign. The new campaign foresaw the creation of a memorial project highlighting the contested issue of land ownership, which is one of the core concerns of the museum.

Without claiming that the museum represents the whole of District Six, it can certainly be argued that it has become one of the socio-political centres of gravity around which narratives of returnees have been centred and organised. The Homecoming Centre is becoming a key location in which people from different backgrounds can meet and interact in order to reconstitute a District Six that accounts for the contemporary challenges of the city. The question of land restitution and return is thus heavily debated in the venues of the actual district itself, rather than exclusively in the formal centres of the city.

The example of District Six interestingly reflects the contested notion of what the 'centre' of a city is and should represent. District Six is physically in the inner city and has undergone a transformation in terms of its population and politicisation. Before apartheid a rather cosmopolitan community, the area was later used as a way of

cementing white supremacy in the cityscape through the expulsion of non-whites. Interestingly, similar to what happened in Khayelitsha, District Six has now undergone a transformation in meaning and now represents a platform on which the past can be dealt with and, to a certain extent, overcome. The creation of the District Six Museum and the Homecoming Centre indeed symbolises an attempt, a spatial strategy, to counter the efforts to segregate society during apartheid as well as the idea to use the legacy of the past to construct a better future. The key words on the walls of the museum, 'Formation–Resistance–Restitution', are indeed indicative of the museum's attempt to use history as a point of departure on which a different future for the district can be built. This equally implies the relabelling of space; that is, the attempt to challenge a narrative of spatial segregation in favour of a more diverse interpretation of District Six, where people can feel welcome irrespective of their ethnic or racial identity. The narratives collected in the museum space and implemented through the work of the Homecoming Centre reflect the creation of a community around cosmopolitan values as celebrated in the district's past, and reflect the extent to which such narratives do not centre around the city as a whole, but around the district as a point of gravity for the construction of such narratives. For returnees, this is not so much about returning to Cape Town, but about returning to District Six. The museum has certainly been playing a key role in the transformation of District Six and it can also be said to have displayed more agency than an exhibition space would be expected to provide. It was not least a certain degree of international attention (through research and funding) that may have helped promote the museum's work beyond its immediate local context.

### Concluding reflections

Against the background of policies of segregation and relocation, which continue to divide Cape Town even today, 20 years after the formal end of apartheid, this chapter has suggested a closer focus on the agents of change, not only situated in the city's cores, but also in its alleged peripheries. The size of Cape Town alone would

probably suffice to claim that the city cannot be investigated only as a unit, and instead justifies a focus on its smaller units, such as neighbourhoods, townships, or districts. However, it is often mistakenly assumed that activities, both in the centre and the peripheries of the city, are oriented towards a common political core.

In contrast, what this chapter shows is, as a reaction to segregation and relocalisation, the emergence of lived subcultures in townships and districts, which develop their narratives beyond the official stories of the city. A number of actors, including social movements, community actors, museum, and centres are contributing to the political activation of the socio-political peripheries and make them actors in their own right. At the same time, this observation raises a question about how we define a 'core' of the city? Where is it that all activities are concentrated? Is there a common point of orientation or a centre of gravity? The example of Cape Town strongly suggests that such cores depend on one's position in the system and the extent to which the core is operational to a community's needs. This has to do with the physical position of the community, which, as with the case of Khayelitsha, is geographically distant from the city centre. On the other hand, while District Six can be considered part of Cape Town's inner city, it still has its very specific narratives around its own *particular* history and the ways in which this can impact upon its future. We can therefore see discourses emerge which potentially challenge narratives concerning the city as a whole, and people using smaller communities as centres of orientation. Indeed, a high number of (especially poorer) people on the outskirts of Cape Town have never been to the city as such, and although we may refer to them as Capetonians, they may not feel the affiliation with the city as much as with their smaller communities. It is also these communities in which political mobilisation takes place, not least due to their social fabric, which the government has often sought to undermine due to its relocation policies. I would therefore suggest that the city is not just managed and controlled from its very political centre, but that its impulses and energies originate from multiple points, and often from those where they are least expected or even sought to be silenced. A variety of actors fulfil the functions that formal bureaucracies are unable or even unwilling to fulfil.

This may be in the form of soup kitchens or community services, but also political mobilisation and resistance against socio-political structures which are perceived as unjust. It can be argued that the agency of those alleged peripheries to define their existence in their own right creates further cleavages in the urban landscape. At the same time, the cohesion we find in smaller neighbourhoods is a mechanism ensuring that agency is not just concentrated in the power centres, but is claimed back by the people who are politically marginalised. Therefore, in order to understand city life, we need to grasp the complex (and often informal) networks through which people find orientation and stability, and how they cope with segregation and conflict. A formal centre may only be a formal centre, but the question of where the real political centres of Cape Town are is different and points to the centrifugal forces of the divisive politics of the apartheid past, and, to a certain extent, to the divisive effects in economic terms as brought about by the neoliberalisation and increasing impoverishment of society in Cape Town.

## Notes

- 1 Information about this movement is taken from a visit to their community centre in 2012 and an interview with the main organiser, Ntsoaki Dina Motolwana, Khayelitsha, 3 September 2012.
- 2 Information about this movement is mainly based on an interview with the former organiser of the campaign in the Western Cape, Mzonke Poni, Khayelitsha, 30 August 2012.
- 3 The insights about the District Six Museum and Homecoming Centre are based on museum visits, an event in the Homecoming Centre, and two meetings with organisers and curators of the museum, viz. Crischene Julius, Tina Smith and Mandy Sanger, Cape Town, 19 August 2012; and Crischene Julius and Tina Smith, Cape Town, 6 December 2012.